



Linking the Teacher School Improvement

Although the main purpose of a school improvement plan is to drive a school's annual goals for student achievement, because of time constraints, principals sometimes find that their plan is sitting on a shelf or has been submitted to supervisors to meet a requirement but never implemented. If the school improvement plan includes input from all stakeholders and focuses on data-driven processes that are linked to teacher appraisal, however, it can be powerful in leading the school toward the common mission of achieving student success.

Writing an excellent school improvement plan does not guarantee that all staff members will buy into its goals or set individual goals that support it. By using the teacher appraisal process, however, the principal can facilitate the link between the goals of the school improvement plan and each teacher's individual goals. Linking the school improvement plan to the teacher appraisal process creates a system whereby all individuals are focused on the school's goals and each individual understands his or her part in achieving those goals. Moreover, if the teacher appraisal process replaces traditional teacher evaluations, it will foster trust and professional collaboration.

Northgate High School in Newnan, GA, began linking its school improvement plan to the teacher

appraisal process on a voluntary basis approximately three years ago. Currently, all teachers participate in teacher appraisal, and teachers who are new to the school system have one school year to observe this process. Northgate uses the following general guidelines to implement the link between writing, implementing, and carrying out its school improvement plan and ultimately linking it to teacher appraisal.

Formulating the Improvement Plan

Each summer, Northgate's leadership team builds its school improvement plan by looking at quantitative and qualitative data that the school gathered throughout the year. Although the overall focus of the school improvement plan can be stated in three words—students, achievement, and technology—the individual goals under each of these categories are adjusted on the basis of the data.

Quantitative Data

Northgate's leadership team considered the school's historical adequate yearly progress (AYP) data by subgroup, particularly for English and mathematics. The team also considered data concerning the number of students who participated in extra tutorial sessions and their results on the Georgia High School Graduation Tests. For example, 95% of the students who attended

Appraisal Process to the Improvement Plan

BY THERESE REDDEKOPP

remediation sessions for the writing portion of the test were successful in passing that portion of the test. The leadership team also considered other types of data, such as grades from AP courses and end-of-course test scores.

The quantitative data forms the basis for the achievement goals of the school improvement plan. For example, the leadership team considered the growing number of federally identified subgroups as well as the increasing population of Northgate, and it decided that the achievement goal for the 2006–07 school year should focus on each AYP subgroup meeting or exceeding the absolute bar score. To meet this goal, the team developed the following strategies:

- Implement software programs and increase the technology to support those programs so all students experience high-quality reviews for the Georgia High School Graduation Tests

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A school improvement plan is most relevant when individual teacher goals are linked to it in a deliberate process.

First, the school improvement plan is made meaningful by incorporating quantitative and qualitative data and input from all stakeholders.

Once the plan is complete, teachers relate their professional goals to the plan and work toward them with the assistance of their quality team.

Therese Reddekopp
therese.reddekopp@cowetaschools.org

Reddekopp is the principal of Northgate High School in Newnan, GA. She is a former foreign language teacher and assistant principal of instruction.



NORTHGATE HIGH SCHOOL

Location
Newnan, GA

Grades
9–12

Enrollment
1,667

Community
Suburban

Demographics
79% White, 13.4% Black,
2.4% multiracial, 1.4% Asian
Pacific, 0.1% American
Indian/Alaskan

Administrative team
1 principal and 4 assistant
principals

Faculty
108 certified staff members

Staff
53 noncertified personnel

- Identify failures early to establish conferences and help students get back on track
- Review progress and mentoring of all students in AYP subgroup areas
- Hold advisement sessions that focus solely on individual student achievement and guidance needed for students to be academically successful
- Hold evening tutoring sessions
- Increase the number of students enrolled in AP courses and the number of students who test and score 3, 4, or 5 on the AP exams
- Increase SAT scores through rigorous and relevant instruction
- Ensure that teachers' appraisal goals are directly linked to student achievement goals.

Qualitative Data

To support the goals and strategies for the students and the technology portions of the school improvement plan, the team also considers qualitative data. At the end of each school year, each teacher lists a few ways in which the school excels and a few in which it needs improvement. These lists are compiled by category. The top five aspects for which teachers feel that the school excels included:

- Involvement of everyone in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools accreditation process
- Overall organizational leadership of the school
- Preparation for high-stakes testing
- Support from administrators in a way that is positive and not intimidating
- Communication of details by e-mail to save faculty meeting time for instructional issues.

Five aspects that were noted as areas needing improvement included:

- Updates in technology
- Inconsistencies in counting tardies

- Practice throughout the year for high-stakes tests, rather than right before the tests
- Parking issues
- Reorganization of the advisement process to focus on student achievement.

Other qualitative data included a review of the Viking Code, which consists of 15 statements that supplement the school's mission statement, "Northgate is committed to student success." The code was written by all stakeholders, including parents, students, staff and faculty members, administrators, and community members. Although the quantitative data drives the portion of the school improvement plan that addresses achievement, the qualitative data form the basis for the portions of the plan that address students and technology. From the qualitative data, the following goals were developed:

- Monthly sessions with the Principal's Advisory Board, a group of students who review the Viking Code, the mission statement, and the school improvement plan with administrators. To model problem-solving techniques among students, this group also considers problems that arise for which student input is valuable.
- Purchase, use, and model technology within the classroom so student achievement is supported to its maximum capacity.

The next step involves having every member of the organization buy into the plan, and this step can be accomplished by linking the school improvement plan to the teacher appraisal process.

Implementing the Teacher Appraisal Process

After the leadership team formulates the goals and strategies for the school improvement plan, the members of the team help the administrators present the plan to the faculty at the beginning of the school year. Each teacher is then

Northgate social studies teacher Robert Skinner clarifies his appraisal goals with Assistant Principal Bill Harrison.

given time to think about his or her appraisal goals as they relate to the achievement portion of the plan.

The appraisal process at Northgate consists of teachers working toward professional goals for three semesters, although they can modify their goals during those three semesters. Because the appraisal process replaces the standard teacher evaluation process, teachers control their professional goals and how those goals relate to student achievement. A major factor in the process involves the professional dialogue between teachers and administrators, and Northgate accomplishes this aspect in two ways: through the quality team administrator and through the quality team group.

Quality Teams

Northgate is organized into quality teams whereby all the departments are divided among five administrators. Each administrator provides guidance for the teachers in his or her quality team. The quality team administrator and each individual teacher within the quality team hold an initial appraisal meeting during which the administrator helps the teacher clarify his or her goals in relation to student achievement. Administrators are trained to listen actively, rephrase the teacher's goals, and allow time for the teacher to clarify his or her thoughts (Garmston, 2000). The administrator may take notes; the teacher is not required to turn in paperwork, however. As the session concludes, the administrator asks if there are ways that the administrative team can help the teacher achieve his or her goals. The administrator also asks the teacher to think about the upcoming quality team meeting that will focus on the appraisal process.

The faculty meets twice a month: once as a large group, and once as quality teams. Early in the school year, usually during October or November, quality teams meet to have a group discussion about each teacher's goals. Discussions include success stories that describe how teachers are accomplishing their goals as well as reports of any struggles teachers are having. This process creates a support system that focuses on professional growth, collegiality, and fostering of one another's goals (Caswell, 2002).

Because the appraisal process replaces the formal evaluation system, the quality team administrator's role changes from a formal observation to administrative walk-throughs during which the administrator looks for evidence of the teacher's focus on his or her goals. Together, the quality team admin-



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istrator, the teacher, and the quality team form a coaching system where trust, support, and collegiality are fostered and teacher growth through continuous improvement is maximized (Gideon, 2002).

Conclusion

After the school improvement plan is written, one of the biggest challenges lies in how to implement it so each teacher feels ownership of the school's goals. Linking the school improvement plan to the teacher appraisal process ensures that teachers know the school's goals and are working toward achieving them.

For example, the appraisal goals of AP teachers at Northgate for the last few years have focused on increasing the number of students who take AP exams and the number who score 3, 4, or 5 in their AP courses. Since 2003, the number of students taking AP courses has risen and 78% of them score 3 or higher; in 7 of 11 AP courses, more than 80% of students score 3 or higher. In addition, Northgate's focus on students, achievement, and technology is incorporated into the school improvement plan as well as the appraisal system, and Northgate's SAT scores reflect this: Northgate students score 69 points above the state average and 28 points above the national average. Although the school is growing and becoming more diverse with regard to AYP subgroups, the link between the school improvement plan and the teacher appraisal process focuses the staff on excellence in achievement for all students. **PL**

References

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